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TOURS OF RECITATION THROUGH GERMANY

"THE reformers," by which I mean the adherents of the new method of teaching modern languages in Germany, have given a new impetus to their system by engaging every year some ladies or gentlemen of the educational profession to make tours of recitation through the country. We owe this idea to Mr. Hartmann, of Leipzig, who from the very first has been an earnest advocate of the intuitive method. The great object of this gentleman is to bring teachers and pupils as often and as soon as possible in contact with foreigners. For this purpose he established the international correspondence plan among pupils of Germany, France, England, and America, and after six years of successful operation I am glad to say that it has brought a great number of American girls and boys, ladies and young men, in contact with correspondents of the same age and sex. So numerous were sometimes the demands for correspondents from the other side of the Atlantic that it was often impossible to comply with all the wishes as promptly as might be desired. I hope this laudable zeal will continue for I am sure it will work to the benefit of the two countries which are so closely connected by ties of friendship and by mercantile, industrial, and literary interests.

The establishment of the tours of recitation came about because of the failure of another plan which had been tried by the Department of Education in France. When some five years ago I visited France that I might investigate the progress of teaching modern languages in the secondary schools, especially the teaching of German, M. Rabier, the excellent directeur de l'enseignement secondaire en France showed me a new plan of increasing the knowledge of German among French boys. It was to send his young countrymen to Germany, not singly as was the custom, nor during the long vacations only, but by whole classes and for a year, under the guidance of an experienced

teacher, well acquainted with the language and the customs of Germany. They were to become regular students in a German school, participating in the work and in the privileges just as the ordinary students of the school; a class from a German school, corresponding to the French one in age and knowledge, were to come to France and enter upon the work there in the same manner.

The plan was excellent and would certainly have helped the knowledge of German and French in the two countries. Moreover, it proves what a conciliatory spirit is now prevailing among our French colleagues, even in the highest offices. The plan, however, was too beautiful to be executed. It failed for several reasons: First of all, the German schools with the exception of three or four in which are taught chiefly classical languages, are not boarding schools and hence our government did not know where to procure quarters for the French guests. This difficulty, of course, did not exist in France as all French secondary schools have accommodations for boarders. Then there was a very strong opposition on the part of parents, the Teutonic as well as the Gallic mothers being afraid of the neighbors beyond the Rhine, who scarcely a generation ago had stood in war against each other and who perhaps would murder their pure, innocent boys. A horrible idea! They said, and said emphatically, that they would never consent to such a plan with those dangers.

It was the energy of a single German teacher, Mr. Hartmann, that made up in some degree for that loss. With the same tenacity with which he has always held out against the attacks on the scheme of international correspondence, he tried a new means of getting the pupils into contact with foreigners. He recognized that through a correspondence the style and ability of writing would improve, but he thought that through a recitation by foreigners there would come a decided improvement in pronunciation. The beginning of this movement was made with a Frenchman. It is a fact worth noticing that no reciter by profession, no actor, or anyone of the kind was chosen for this purpose, but a professor of one of the great colleges, M. Jouffret,

who is well known in France for his literary ability as evidenced in his excellent poems, and who among his colleagues is considered as one who has the full mastery over his language. I fully approve of this choice for I remember that when a boy I once heard a reciter in the school I attended who imitated the language and gestures of an actor and by this completely spoiled the lecture. That was not the language which we were wont to hear from our teachers, especially from the one who taught us our native language and who in our opinion spoke the best German that could be heard. Compared to our teacher, the reciter appeared to us like a Jack-a-dandy, and all through his recitation teachers as well as pupils were tittering so that his efforts to make an impression upon us were entirely fruitless. It was the funniest thing that we had ever seen or heard.

The danger of becoming ridiculous is still greater for Frenchmen, who, with their natural liveliness and vivacity of gestures, are very much inclined to act as if they were on the stage. Every gesture, therefore, as well as the intonations, must be carefully studied before a piece is recited to a foreign audience. Our German pupils, and the English, too, abhor all kinds of theatrical declamation. It requires, therefore, careful and serious preparation on the part of the reciter if he will not spoil the effect of his recital. The same preparation is necessary on the part of the pupils if the poems are to be completely understood and are to have the desired effect. A selection of the favorite poems and passages from dramatists was, therefore, made and the pupils who wished to assist at recitation had to prepare these and have difficult passages explained. Then, and only then, they understood the meaning of what was recited, and what is more, could direct their entire attention to the pronunciation, so that they were able to make an intelligent comparison between their teacher's manner of pronunciation and that of the foreign gentleman. If the above mentioned preparation was not made, the sound of the voice passed by the ears of the auditors and meant nothing to them. The students openly confessed this and certainly the reciter could have observed it from their manner. That the pupils might have the opportunity

of ascertaining whether they could understand words in French to which they were not accustomed, M. Jouffret, before beginning a new recitation, always made a few introductory observations. Prior to the recitation of a scene of a drama he always explained to the audience what had preceded, to what point the action had come, who were the principal persons in the drama, their character, etc. As a result of these remarks, the recitation was not a series of broken pieces of poetry, but an uninterrupted line of glittering pearls, presented to the pupils in the glowing light of the sun. The subject-matter of these recitations may be of some interest. The following is part of the program :

1. *Athalie*. (The prophecy of Joas, III.)
3. A scene from the "*Bourgeois gentilhomme*" between M. Jourdain and the master of philosophy.
3. Two fables of La Fontaine—*Le Savetier et Le Financier* et *Les Animaux malades de la peste*.
4. Two poems of E. Béranger—*Les Hirondelles* et *Les Souvenirs du peuple*.
5. Four of Victor Hugo's—*Quand nous habitons tous ensemble*, *O Souvenirs*; *Printemps*; *Aurore*; *Dolorosae L'Expiation*. The prose was represented by a scene from *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière* (IV, 2), and four pieces from Daudet: *Tartarin de Tarascon I (Le Chasseur de Casquette)*; *Les Vieux*; *L'Agonie de Sémillante*; *Le Sous-Préfet aux champs*. Most of the schools insisted upon hearing *Athalie* and *L'Expiation*, chiefly to have their pupils hear the declamation of the Alexandrine verse which is so difficult, particularly for strangers, on account of the pronunciation of the "e mute."

The first time was a complete success. M. Jouffret gave forty-nine lectures in about forty towns, pretty well covering the whole of Germany from west to east and from north to south; from Constanx to Grandenz, from Cologne to Kattowitz. But it was not the recitals alone that made this tour profitable to the German teachers; in all larger towns, M. Jouffret read a paper on some interesting aspects of the French language and literature, in which he proved himself a most powerful speaker, a deep

philosopher, and an extremely sensitive poet whose works may be ranked among the best of modern French literature.

The expense of these recitations to the pupil's parents was so slight that it was hardly worth mentioning. They paid three pence each for a lecture that never lasted less than an hour. The audiences were very large. In fact, in some of the smaller towns they were larger than in the great cities. The lecturer felt amply rewarded for his effort and the hearty reception encouraged others to take up this work. The success of this movement is assured and regular tours of recitation have been established. The girls, boys, and teachers really long for the time when the foreign idiom will again be heard with that purity and suavity which strangers—except perhaps Russians—will never be able to acquire. The French reciters were soon followed by English ones, and, if Americans, too, would participate, they would receive a hearty welcome.¹

Reste un dernier point : qu'elle est l'influence de ces récitations sur les élèves ? Je crois pouvoir affirmer qu'elle est très grande. Une réserve cependant : elle ne s'exerce que si les morceaux ont été soigneusement préparés à l'avance, si les élèves, connaissant à fond le contenu du morceau, n'ont plus à s'occuper que de la prononciation. Dans certains cas—très rares, heureusement—où les élèves n'avaient jamais eu le texte entre les mains, celle-ci, évidemment, a passé au-dessus ou à côté d'eux et ils n'en ont tiré aucun profit. Mais, quand le morceau a été étudié de près, sous la direction des excellents *néo-philologues* qui possède l'Allemagne, d'abord les élèves entendent la véritable prononciation et la véritable déclamation. Je ne veux pas dire qu'ils ne puissent l'apprendre de leurs professeurs : mais ceux-ci, qui n'ont tous ni le temps, ni souvent le moyen de venir en France chaque année, perdent fatalement un peu la prononciation si pure qu'ils possédaient, d'autant que, de leurs élèves, ils entendent, surtout en certaines provinces, les fautes les plus épouvantables. Eux-mêmes ne font pas difficulté de l'avouer. Que de fois m'a-t-on répété : "Nous ne parlons pas assez ; nous n'avons pas l'occasion de parler !" D'ailleurs il en est de même

¹ All such arrangements may be made through Dr. Hartmann, Leipzig, or the writer of these lines, Dr. Thiergen, Radeberger Strasse No. 8, Dresden. To show how such lecturers are received in this country I am adding the report which M. Henri Bornecque, maître de conférences à la faculté des lettres à l'université de Lille, last year's reciter, published in the *Revue Universitaire* under the title, *Un Voyage de Recitations en Allemagne*.

chez nous. Mais l'utilité ne se borne pas à l'enseignement de la prononciation, si important déjà, puisque l'accent mal placé sur un mot—j'en parle par expérience—empêche d'être compris ou vous fait mal comprendre. Le récitant est aussi le collaborateur du professeur. Souvent les élèves, lorsque leur maître veut leur imposer telle prononciation difficile pour eux, ont une tendance à croire qu'il accumule par plaisir les difficultés; après la récitation, il n'en est plus de même: le professeur peut évoquer le souvenir du récitant et les élèves le reconnaissent les premiers; j'ai reçu là-dessus des confidences très précises. Car les auditeurs, petits ou grands, apportent une attention vraiment extraordinaire; ils remarquent jusqu'aux moindres détails et j'en ai vu beaucoup noter sur leur texte la prononciation figurée de tel ou tel son. Enfin, il y a plus. Si les élèves arrivent à comprendre les explications données—et, pour cela, il suffit de ne pas employer des expressions trop recherchées, de parler lentement et distinctement—they sont "enflammés d'un nouveau zèle" pour l'étude de la langue française: c'est l'expression même dont se servait un élève de Leipzig, il y a un mois, dans un devoir où il avait à raconter la récitation qu'il avait entendue. Ces voyages entraînent donc des résultats assez considérables au point de vue pédagogique; les conséquences en sont encore d'un autre ordre, et d'une portée bien plus haute à la fois et bien plus lointaine. Dans une des villes que j'ai visitées, le professeur qui m'introduisait a fait précéder ma récitation de quelques paroles, où il disait, entre autres choses, que mon voyage était un signe des temps, et qu'il eût été impossible il y a vingt ans. C'est que, en effet, dans nombre de villes, grandes ou petites, que ne visitent jamais les Français—dans telle place forte, on n'en avait pas vu depuis la guerre—le récitant est considéré comme le représentant—très humble, je le dis tout de suite—de la nation française. On nous juge mal à l'étranger; certains romans nous ont fait beaucoup de tort et l'on a tendance à nous représenter comme plus ou moins semblables au Rivault de la Marlinière de Lessing. C'est à ceux d'entre nous qui vont en Allemagne de donner de notre race une idée plus adéquate à la réalité; sans compter enfin, comme l'écrivait ici même M. Jouffret, que "le meilleur moyen de susciter dans les cœurs plus d'harmonie et de solidarité, c'est de faire pénétrer dans les esprits plus de lumière et de mutuelle intelligence."

Pour toutes ces raisons, je souhaiterais voir de telles récitations introduites chez nous. Nos élèves sont capables d'en tirer profit; je sais tel pédagogue, le plus éminent d'Allemagne, dont j'ai le nom au bout de la plume, qui est prêt à entreprendre ce voyage et y réussirait à merveille; tout dépend de nos professeurs. Je regrette de n'être pas assez autorisé pour prendre la direction et me charger de l'organisation d'une semblable tournée; mais, si des correspondances particulières me laissaient croire qu'on ait chance de réussir—et je répondrai volontiers à toutes les questions—on trouverait, j'en suis convaincu, un homme prêt à se mettre à la tête d'une entreprise si féconde en résultats de tout genre. Je souhaite seulement que le récitant—

puisse-t-il être appelé dans un avenir rapproché!—trouve, chez nous, dans tous les milieux, un accueil aussi cordialement sympathique que la réception dont m'ont honoré partout les professeurs et les directeurs allemands! Ils me permettront d'offrir ici mes remerciements les plus sincères à eux d'abord, ensuite à l'homme dont le patronage vaut auprès des néo-philologues la plus flatteuse introduction, à l'organisateur de ce voyage, M. le professeur Hartmann.

OSCAR THIERGEN

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